

Donald Johnson
Bx 263
Kailua-Kona
HI 96745

Pararescue Association
Bill Vargas
PO Box 13351
Albuquerque
NM 87192-3351

Bill,

Enclosed is my written history of the mission 18 Jan 69 in which Tom Pope, myself and the team of Jolly Green 67 was shot down. I give you and the PJ association a copy so that you know what I've written and sent to the Sandy Association. This was in a response to Dan Medeiros, Skyraider Association historian, request for information about the mission. It is yours to read and share as you see fit. I make no excuse for its content or its attitude; its how I felt then and still do now. I hope Tom Pope is also contributing to the Sandys effort to collect histories of our various missions together as Rescue.

I really enjoyed this last reunion. So much of its friendships and re-acquaintances has helped me. I appreciate the time and effort it takes to put one of these meetings together and thank you for your persistence with the characters of our mettle.

Yours still a PJ at heart, in mind and body,

DC "Surfer" Johnson

Robert LaPointe

From: DC Surfer Johnson [dmacnuts@gte.net]
Sent: Monday, January 13, 2003 9:55 AM
To: Robert LaPointe
Subject: CSAR STORMY 02B monograph

Hi Bob,

Yes you may use the information I sent you. BUT, I am the editor NOT the writer of the monograph. Most of the monograph's contents came from the Checo report on the mission and I just corrected, rewrote and edited some of the contents as well as added my own touches.

So you have the summary on paper. There is VIDEO of the whole debriefing available if you are interested; its about four hours long and includes all we discussed at the last CSAR at WPAFB.

I would ask though, that for purposes of wide spread review, only the first initial of the man's "familiar" name be on the web accompanied with his last name (family) and not their whole name spelled out for all. I considered this only after I sent to you and others and am making that adjustment on my work. It is a courtesy even though this is public record. Additionally, I am expanding this monograph into a book about my search for the conclusion to this mission after thirty years of anguish over its outcome. This would include video record of the return to Laos in Feb 2004 and the continued search for JG67. As I research this project more material becomes available i.e. photos of the bombs blasting JG67, U-2 aerials of the area, and personal information on the mission as it progressed. I see this as a 200 page offering.

I look forward to you second installment. As always I am ready to purchase three copies in advance.

I am thinking about the JG reunion in May at FWB; it follows the CSAR debriefing at DMAFB the next weekend, so I'll see.

As a point of reference for you, I have been in touch with about two dozen of the men who worked that mission, CSAR Stormy 02Bravo, out of a possible one hundred; the important ones, my crew, Sorensen's team, the Nail & Sandy's, and RUSTIC have all been contacted and prepared to interview. At this point, the CSAR Stormy 02Bravo is probably the most extensively debriefed SAR on record now, as previous to this no one has gotten all the perspectives of the mission; now we have.

George Marrett who was Sandy 13 on the Tchepone mission, 18 Jan, and actually saw JG67 shot down - he was in the 5:00 high position - has a book coming out called, "Cheating Death: Combat Air Rescues in VietNam and Laos."

Take care and arrive safe,

Whoo-ya's,

DC Surfer

1/17/69

RESCUE O' RESCUE

BY
D.DOC JOHNSON

Bx 263
Kailua-Kona
Hawaii 96745
c copyright 1995

TO Perseus
"That other magical

RESCUE O' RESCUE

BY

D.DOC JOHNSON

When it detonated, blowing the tail section of Jolly Green 67 to shreds, I was just trying to survive. When we crashed, I never thought I would spend the rest of my life a psychological prisoner of the Second Indochina War, The Vietnam Conflict. And to further complicate the situation, I wasn't in Vietnam when the HH-53B, "BUFF Super Jolly Green Giant," Sikorsky helicopter smashed into the jungle; I was near Tchepone, Laos. But, that was the "Ack-Ack" of being in Air Rescue determined to withhold from capture any person whose security had been comprised by the North Vietnamese Army.

Those days, no matter how hard you try to drink them away, have a very intense habit of ripping a good time bad leaving the tattered pieces of subsequent sanity to waste. Yea, wasted. You got to the point of wanting to waste everything that moved. You feared constantly. You became the creature of macabre, a Grim Reaper warmed over with vengeance. And, as the death toll of friends and companions mounted, you didn't give a fuck any more. Just make the next mission more of a challenge. That's what you eventually wanted, the toughest most impossible mission to confound you. And maybe, ... maybe you could die a hero.

18 January 1969 was the toughest most impossible Search and Rescue mission in which I was ever involved. It has colored everything I have touched since then. And the fear is still there, a component of my life, a monkey on my back and the unpleasant rancid stink in the sweats of my nightmares. When I think back, on that day, well, it's both nostalgic and horrendous. And that's the way it has been for the twenty-five years that have passed.

17 January 1969, I was informed by command that the next morning was an all out Search and Rescue (SAR) for three men. Earlier that day a Phantom F-4C took anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) in the jet and the occupants of the disabled plane ejected. They landed in a swampy region of the Xe Pone river which flows near Tchepone, Laos. When a Sandy A-1E rescue support aircraft provided close air cover to protect the two downed Americans, it too was shot down and its occupant ejected near the western regions of mountains of Tchepone. He stayed in a tree top for the night while the two F-4 jocks hid within the reeds of the river's banks.

Tom Pope and I had the positions of high bird Pararescueman in Jolly Green 67. Funny thing is, I don't remember who were low bird PJ's. My memory contains large black holes where the light of recall is sucked into an abyss. The doctors say its a response to the intensity of the battle, traumatic amnesia. Which is probably right 'cause I was really scared shitless when we came over the mountains into Tchepone and everything including the kitchen sink (I swear I saw one fly by with "NVA" on it) flew up; detonations engulfed us. Anti-aircraft artillery explosions were so intense as to lead one to believe they could be easily walked from one burst of hell to another. Jeez' the whole valley was decorated in pompoms, black and gray mushrooms, celebrating our arrival (The NVA invitation read, "It's our party and you can die if you want to.") Tracers from 12.7mm/.51cal machine guns and the ubiquitous communist AK-47 weapon zinged up at us from the mountainside as well as the valley floor. At 10,000 feet, where we were placed into orbit, we could hear the scratches of death claw into our helicopter. It was not a nice place to be and there really wasn't any hope of it getting substantially better.

The space above the battle field was an aerial circus. "Nail," Forward Air Controllers, in hot-rodded Cessna 170's, were vectoring in the jets; "Sandys," A-1s, Korean War vintage prop aircraft, flew tree chopping altitude trolling for ground fire; "Crown," HC-130P Hercules aircraft, circled above 10 grand overseeing every bit of air operations. The modified C-130 four turbo-prop cargo carrier could provide air to air refueling for the Jolly Green's. Acting as the on scene command post, it was an even juicier target for the "nine-level expert" NVA anti-aircraft gunners on the ground.

From 0600 onwards, Tom and I stayed near the windows of our Jolly looking at the genuine forth of July she-bang; our helmets tuned into the "command commentary" as dozens of voices flooded the airwaves with reports and descriptions of the event. From this day forward any display of fireworks could not compare to The Show at Tchepone. There is no way of adequately explaining the intensity and continuousness of the explosions. It could be likened to living through a popcorn roasting session as an unpopped kernel. The whine of our turbines, a high pitched banshee, piercing scream, , very noisy, yet, frequently Tom and I could hear the boom and whiz of the exploding shells near us. The violent fragments gouging our helicopter with the sound of rocks striking a tin roof.

So, you sit on top of this roiling cacophony of seething death, the special teams player waiting for the coach to put you in. You sure don't want to return home to Udon RTAFB, Thailand, without a save. But the earnestness of the AAA gunners seems almost insurmountable. Yet, there came a break and Sandy One called for the Jolly Green "low bird" to go in. The Jolly's operated on a paired concept with one rescue helicopter designated "low bird" to make the pickup of the survivors on the ground, while the other Jolly called, "high bird" remained at altitude to be used in case of emergency if the "low bird" Jolly got shot down. Low Bird descended to make the pickup of the pilots in the river.

The PJ medic spends fifteen minutes, that's FIFTEEN MINUTES, count 'em folks, (six hundred seconds where anyone could be your last earthly breath) on the ground, surrounded. His helicopter above him a large, obtrusive and obvious indicator as to where he is. He calmly tries to prepare the pilot into a state of medical repair so they both can be transported, by hoist, back into the hovering helicopter. Once into the helo, the Jolly speeds off to Da Nang Air Base, Vietnam, with their recently retrieved cargo. Only one pilot was recovered, though, and it is through him we learn of the probable demise of his companion. An NVA patrol discovering the man's hiding place and the ensuing gun battle left one more American dead to add to the accumulation now called, THE WALL.

During the save of the F-4 jock, the "Nit Noy" Jolly's, which were the HH-3E Sikorsky "Rescue Modified" CH-3 cargo helicopter from Da Nang and NKP, bingo'd on fuel. Because of the intensity of the ground fire and the heat of the day they could not refuel at altitude, as we had a few . . . minutes prior to the pickup, from the Hercules HC-130P refueler. The Nit Noys (Thai for little one) turned reluctantly to Da Nang for ground refueling returning to Tchepone, Laos, after they topped off. We, as Jolly Green 67 stayed on station, the only Jolly available to make a pickup of the Sandy pilot if the call came forth.

The Call came forth. With another Super Jolly Green on the way from Udorn RTAFB, 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, we of JG 67 began our descent from 10 grand and into the malevolence. Sandy Lead guided us to our destination, while the other Sandys, at least four aircraft strong, provided close air support below us until, at 500 feet above ground level, we were on our own. The Sandys circled our perimeter, but we no longer had their underneath cover to protect our more than vulnerable underbelly. REMEMBER! THERE ARE NO FLYING TANKS! The Pilots of our Jolly, had the survivors parachute sighted. The Flight Mechanic, Staff Sergeant James R. Perdue, also called he had a visual, not only of the parachute, but the Sandy pilot as well, who, with the oncoming of the helicopter, uncovered himself of the green and brown panels of his parachute, demonstrating his aliveness. The hoist was set with the "jungle penetrator" on and ready to descend. I was prepared to mount and descend on one of the three fold down seats of the penetrator if the pilot needed assistance. That seemed unlikely since he assured us, over his ARC-10 personal survival radio, he was unharmed but extremely anxious to leave the inhospitable surroundings.

Prior to this mission, when Tom Pope and I were high bird for the F-4 rescue, Tom had been #1 PJ which afforded him the privilege of going down on the penetrator when the opportunity arose. As Pararescueman or "PJ" (PJ was the alphabetical nomenclature in Air Rescue for the Pararescueman when he was going to make a Parachute Jump; but, it became a sobriquet as well as the identity for all Pararescueman) in Indochina we considered the hoist/penetrator ride the ultimate experience of combat. You sat on one of three tongues that folded outward perpendicular to the body of the device. Its weight, twenty-six lbs, and

elongated tear drop shape, approximately 36 inches in length, aided descent through the very dense forest, triple canopy high over most of Southeast Asia. You'd mount the contraption, swing out into the breeze and there you were outside a hovering vehicle on equipment hung by a hoist with 250' of 3/8" stainless steel cable. You represent the quintessential baited hook. You were lowered two hundred feet completely UNprotected and visible from the ground by enemy troops. They knew where the helicopter was I can assure you. At anytime THEY could open fire and YOU had to take it. When you arrived on the ground, except for your patient, you were the only "good guy" in "Indian country." During your time there everything was up to you. All your decisions immediately affected you and your patient. The prospect of staying on the ground even for a short time was an indigestible lump of tension, fear and exhilaration. It was at this juncture you could "win" the "Medal of Honor with Bronze 'V' for valor" and all the accolades that proceed from such recognition. So far only Pararescueman William H. Pitsenbarger came close. His election to remain on the ground, while exfiltration of medical casualties during an ambush of an American Ranger team, ranks as Medal of Honor. On 07 March 1966, he had descended on the hoist from the relative safety of his Kaman HH-43B Rescue helicopter to treat and transport as many of the wounded GI's as possible. Although himself wounded in the back, when his helo had reached near capacity, he decided to stay on the ground allowing additional casualties to board the rescue aircraft. His determination, in the center of intense hostile fire, obviously signified the Air Force Cross, the next lowest award to the Medal of Honor. But, he went the extra- that was and is the unique quality of Pararescue, he remained to assist those other wounded. He reloaded their weapons and, himself, returned fire as he attempted to maintain security and the well being of the army troops who had become his charge. When the HH-43F helicopter returned, the firefight had ended. Air Rescue Survival Specialist Pitsenbarger lay dead amid the spent cartridges and battlefield bandages he had used to protect his comrades in arms. William H. Pitsenbarger, on that day truly epitomized the motto of Pararescue, "THESE THING I DO THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE." Rumor had it Army Command, in recognition of Pitsenbarger's valor, re: balls, temerity and courage in the face of certain death, had originally submitted "Pit" for the Medal of Honor. But, the Air Force with its pilot elitist mentality, downgraded the recognition to an Air Force Cross. But..., now..., maybe the Air Force was right. After all Pararescue's

speciality was the extra-ordinary. That was/is the expected ORDINARY of the PJ. Therefore, why award the expectation, after all "He was just doing his job." A Pararescueman who would become "The Pararescueman" would have to go beyond the extra-ordinary into a realm of gladiatorial chivalry, of Knighthood to even Promethean bounds, to achieve what seems to me an improbable act of mythological proportions of heroism, labeled legend, in order to "qualify." Anyway, the hoist ride represented both a trip into hell, into a very small place called HELL, and a chance of a hero's At-ta-Boy.

When we changed missions from the F-4 Phantom to the A-1 Sandy, Tom offered me the #2 gun position, left forward, and become #1 PJ. But, I deferred to his rank of Sergeant. He insisted we let lady chance make the choice. As Tom's quarter flipped through the air, I tapped my butt; I repositioned forward as number one, while Tom stationed himself in the rear of the aircraft at #3 mini-gun position on the tail ramp of the HH-53B, fully exposed and vulnerable. This was my first opportunity to ride the hoist in actual combat. Already I had spent some time on the ground, in Laos, doing the unpleasant task of body recovery from smashed aircraft. (Gag me big time. We had jokingly referred to dead body recovery as one, two and three level "puke-trefactions.") Using ammonia inhalant capsules, to overcome the stench of decomposing flesh: one cap you'd put in your nostril if the dead body was fresh; or two, one in each nostril, if it was a day or so old; and three, with the third in your teeth, if the corpse was more ripe, which, in reality, meant you were "picking up the pieces." This was all in an attempt, sometimes futile, to prevent incapacitation by uncontrollable retching accompanying "cadaver nabbing." Also, I had recently completed the MACV RECONDO, 5th Special Forces course at Nha Trang RSVN, with Pararescueman Steve Northern (37th ARRS at Da Nang RSVN) and Doug King (37th Det 1 ARRS at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB). This course was badly needed by the PJ's because it was taught by the Command and Control, Studies and Observation Group (SOG), who were the US Army Special Forces "Sneaky Petes" in Laos. These exemplary soldiers would teach us how to survive in the real world of combat not the make believe of Air Force survival schools; the difference between the two was the obvious gulf differing the ground and air war in Vietnam/Cambodia/Laos.

The RECONDO cadre took great pride in their instruction, most of them were on their third tour; they'd seen a lot of mistakes take friends lives and were at the school to prevent, as much as possible, the repetition of those fatal flaws. Those men of valor, persistence and incredible courage, taught the students (each had to have at least six months combat "in country" and be assigned to special operations units such as, Ranger, Pathfinder, Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol-Lurp's, or Pararescue to even be considered for the few select slots available each month) assembled at RECONDO school the how to of: creeping around "The Badlands"; what the enemy was going to do when they found out about your presence; and, what you were to do to "get the fuck out of Dodge." Tom Pope had also completed the RECONDO course; we were both on our second tours. So, within the confines of Jolly Green 67, you could not have found a more experienced pair of men in rescue about the circumstance on the ground.

I arrived at RECONDO school in August of '68; it was hot, dusty and the sun bore down in piercing streams of light as I met Pararescueman Luther T. Jones in the camp's compound. Luther, a Large PJ, kindly of manner and an easy grin, replied to my question of, "How's the course?"

"Your gonna love it, 'Surfer.' Its a real toughy, though, and no PJ has failed to pass."

Luther T. came from the Da Nang Jollys, and, I believe Larry Austin was their Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC). It was through Sergeant Austin I was able to convince Lieutenant Colonel Chester R. Ratcliffe Jr., the Commander of the Udorn Jollys, to allow me, the first PJ of our outfit, to experience the RECONDO challenge. Later, with my enthusiastic recommendation, Tom Pope would attend and then others from the 40th ARRS. But, at that time I was our squadrons guinea pig. The combat course explained all the nuances of reconnaissance, compromise and exfiltration. Then practice, Practice and more PRACTICE. If the procedures were not done right now, out in the real world your ass'd be in a sling with somebody bagged and tagged for the mortuary. It was, unquestionably, through this course I was prepared for the hoist ride I anticipated when JG 67 rotated into hover over the waiting Sandy driver.

Yet, it was not to be. The Sandy pilot did not need assistance other than "get me the fuck out of here," so I remained at #2 mini-gun on the port (left) side of the helicopter returning fire as the NVA troops below opened up their flak trap riddling us with small arms rounds. Tom, in the rear of the helo, also returned fire at 3,000 round per minute. I briefly glanced to my left and saw Tom swinging the "mini" back and forth, traversing and firing his weapon attempting to keep the gooks from blowing the ass end of the Jolly to bits. I looked through my gun port and seeing a machine gun crew in their bunker complex, which we were far too close to, I sprayed their area with "mini-spit" watching bodies death dance. The hoist traveled down slowly taking an indeterminably long time to get to the stranded pilot. The helicopter hovered while our Pilots peddled and pawed the beast steady; the Flight Engineer kept a running commentary on the hoist's position; the PJ's remained firing their suppressive bursts. Light splashes and explosions rocked, shook and rolled through our fragile bird; debris rained down from newly perforated holes in our rescue helo as rounds slithered through leaving new rays of sunshine in our otherwise semi-darkened compartment. Then, up the penetrator with a grateful, happily grinning, face came The Sandy Man, bright in the doorway. Once inside, our Flight Mechanic, Perdue, secured the #1 mini-gun into place, in the right side aircraft's crew door (it had been swung out of the way to facilitate hoist operation). I threw The Sandy Man a canteen of water after he motioned thirst. Inside the radio net the command commentary declared through Sandy One in terse statement JG 67 should not attempt to ascend further the mountain's side and stay away from it's crest because the Sandy's were taking ZPU-4 AAA fire. This 23mm weapon was the closest machine-gun the NVA had to our mini's. I was most impressed with the destructive hacking of our mini-GAU/2-gun at 3,000/6,000 rounds per minute of 7.62 cal NATO; therefore, enthusiastically supported the recommendation to avoid the ridge bristling with its network of 23mm ZPU buzz-saws. We rotated 180 degrees and began our escape. Descending back down the mountain spur to gain speed and flying into this valley of death, we made our get-a-way. Yes, I know the One Rule of Thumb in The War: YOU NEVER CAME OUT THE WAY YOU WENT IN. But, like in all ambushes, you've got to charge the ambushers position or get slaughtered because of timidity hounded by crossfire.

* * * *

When you go to war, you'll live with ghosts until the day you die. I didn't consider them then, when I was in the strategically limited yet all encompassing tactical hell of the explosion; but, I have since. And, for all the years which have passed, Jimmy Locker and Doug King have stayed with me; eternal companions spirits, spooks and specters of days bygone. Your friends and compatriots in arms, when they die in combat, never leave you. Your almost an living extension of them; they're vital because you remember. You love them through the horror of armed conflict that bound you Brothers of The Blood. You'll be haunted by them until they really greet you. At that destination you won't care any longer about The War which ripped the virtue from you like a fresh raped virgin. And, for the most part, morally and ethically, we were all virgins when we first stepped into those Jolly's and flew into caprice insanity: WAR!

Pararescueman James D. Locker died June '68; his Jolly, out of Da Nang, flew to an emergency beeper from a deployed parachute after an aircraft had been shot down. Assuming the pilot was alive but too injured to reply through his survival radio (ARC-10), Jim's Jolly approached. The Flak Trap the NVA set in motion immolated Jimmy and the others of his crew. I didn't see it happen, yet, I think of Jim and see a HH-3E Nit Noy Jolly approaching the rescue; I can feel the "g-force" as the helicopter rotates to hover; I sense the excitement of anticipation as Jim mounts the Penetrator for the ride downwards, and then, hit by a 37mm death-shell, exploding into flaming chunks of charred machine and melted bodies all a rolling fire ball, tumbling to earth.

Sometimes, when I see a toe-headed man I'm briefly confused and "recognize" Jimmy and agonize his loss; depression sets in. Bowling, one of his sports was his passion. So much so he expressed his desire to be a pro-bowler after his AF stint. You know, I don't watch TV bowling and, for that matter, I avoid bowling alleys. The vision of a blond male child, the innocence and blue-eyes so like Jim's, can provoke me into despondency's gloomy forest.

PJ Charles Douglas King, prisoner of war'd 25 Dec 68, when his Nit Noy Jolly, flying out of Nakhon Phanom (NKP, or as we referred to the

secret Special Operation Base, "Naked Fanny"; it existed on Thailand's Northeast corner near a right angle bend of the Mekong River) was suckered into a Flak Trap over Laos. During the attempt to haul Doug back into the helicopter, he was hooked in a tree. The pilot of his Jolly elected to sever the hoist cable, using the 22. cal shearing device for such a situation; C.D. King went flailing back into the UNfriendly arms of the NVA. Let's face the fact that the North Vietnamese Army hated SAR forces; enough so that the NVA placed bounties on our heads. But, the PJ's were the particular victims of the NVA's frustrations. The subsequent torture guaranteed unpleasant and cruel; "Charley," V.C. or NVA, could be ever so unkind. This was one of the prices we paid as Pararescueman in "The Southeast Asian War Games" where you could win the battle and still loose The War.

Having known Doug's dark features capped with fierce black hair when we were at RECONDO school, I appreciated him. We were on the same reconnaissance team; ran, ate, schooled and practiced RECONDO together. His tight, nearly stock form with alert eyes and inquisitive mind a steady comfort to my back as I walked point on patrol. Although, I had not gone through Pararescue training with Doug, as I had with Jimmy, I trusted both with my life and with their deaths I became increasingly isolated, crazy and just plain fuckin' mad with the frustration and despair I felt over their loss.

Anyway, like I stated, in the heat of battle, you don't think of those dead friends even though you are experiencing the same Flak Trap phenomenon as they did. You simply try to maintain some semblance of order in pandemonium gone berserk; to this day I feel I failed my composure and my compadres expectations.

* * * * *

When it detonated, that roman-candle, stick of dynamite ignited, blowing Tom Pope's lower left leg into a traumatic amputation, nothings been right since! I turned left to see the problem and all the confusion, disillusionment and dis-ease of my dis-ordered life focused on that tail ramp of Jolly Green 67; I've been trying to scramble off that GodDamn ramp all the years subsequent.

"Tommy's been hit," I yelled into the crew intercom!

I threw off my helmet, ran the length of my "monkey strap" safety harness until it jerked me to a stop. I unhooked the thing and continued to rush to the rear of the aircraft; the strap trailing behind me a gray, two inch wide, nylon tail with a metal hook bouncing as a caboose to my exasperated train. Hydraulic fluid gushed streams of hot, viscous, pink fluid everywhere. There was a very distinct sick-sweet smell of petroleum, Tom was drenched and slipping out and over the tail ramp edge towards a 300 foot fall; his monkey strap cut in two. I reached to save him, slid on the slick, greased flooring, started to follow him into the void outside the helicopter. Desperately I grabbed Tom with my right hand while flailing, stretched with my other arm and grabbed the horizontal retainer strap used to corridor off the rear section of the A/C when the ramp was in firing position; it prevented both of us from falling to our deaths. Pulling Tom back into the interior of the helicopter, I have a vivid memory of him using both of his legs to help motivate us into relative safety. Nothing of the helicopter worked, PERIOD! Though I was not aware, a titanic struggle by our two pilots, Majors Paul J. Darghty and Barton C. Libby, was being waged to keep the aircraft in flight. They valiantly fought the unresponsive controls of the ship to maintain steady flight, yet we roller coasted. We rocked and rolled heading steadily downward into the badlands of "Charles"; he was waiting, arms open, loaded and locked on full-auto. I remained in the rear of the disabled helicopter with my seriously wounded friend. Frantically, I applied a battlefield dressing; using the tails of the rectangular bandage as a makeshift tourniquet, my survival knife as a turnkey, I succeed in reducing the spurting of his arteries. I ran to our medical kit, got a legitimate field tourniquet and secured it so tight around Tom's leg, above his knee, I could hear his screams even into tonight's nightmares. We were still taking ground fire, those persistent fuckers down in the jungle refusing to quit. Purdue, our Flight Mechanic, fired back with the only manned mini; The Sandy Man, we had just rescued, came to help me. Then we heard the mechanic scream,

"We're gonna crash!"

Jeez' we sure did!

Prior to a rescue attempt, when a Jolly was ready to descend for a pickup, the pilots usually topped off the main internal fuel tanks from the exterior reserves located on the sponsons of the helicopter amid-ship, then jettisoning the external tanks. This was done to add maneuverability and speed to the helo. For some reason, a broken servo mechanism, bad indicator light, or simply not enough time, we didn't release the exterior fuel cells; that saved the whole crew of JG 67 from blender death. You see, when we impacted the earth on a downhill slope of the visible aerial landmark, "The Arrowhead," our aircraft lurched onto its left side. The helicopter's rotor head lunged towards the ground and except for the external tank acting as an outrigger on a canoe, the helo would of dismembered the aircraft, the crew, everything, if the rotor blades beat the ground and disintegrated in extremely viscous blows of ground meat and metal. One of my most persistent memories was with Tom Pope on top of me, The Sandy Man, trying his best, retained a grip of the wounded crewmember, as we heaved onto the left external fuel tank. I looked back out past the ramp area and saw a slithering track left by the gas container acting as our stabilizer. All sorts of broken and disheveled debris trailed behind along the furrow. I thought, hell, give The Cong a trail of bread crumbs and they're sure to find the prize at the end of the rainbow. But, this wasn't stale dough we left behind, it was a certified road sign of the Twilight Zone: "Please allow me, if you will, to direct your attention to the sign post up ahead, 'Follow me! Fresh meat!'" We bounced back down level, jittered our way through the clearing, decreasing speed until, of course, the jungle loomed ahead and we rammed into it. Well, we stopped. That was the Good news; Bad News, we were still taking ground fire. A very, very bad sign.

Sometimes it was good, but not intentionally so, that we as Air Rescue really didn't know about the ground situation when we went to do a pickup. This was one of those times. Later, after the incident, I found out we had been the violently invited guests of somewhere around 10,000 armed troops. Now, that's quite a parade if its homecoming and you're on New York's 5th avenue with ticker tape flying a hero's welcome. But, I can assure you it is not when all those armed troops are there to harm you with bullets flying fatal intent. Our escort Sandys immediately formed a

"Circle the wagons" to stave off the "Indian attack." The Sandys expended tons of explosives keeping our inhospitable host at bay. I have completely blocked out the intense, deafening noise of that day.

The Sandy Man helped me place Tom onto our field litter and with Sandy Man up front and with me at the rear, we grabbed the litters hand grips and humped the stretcher towards the exit and the rest of the crew. When we got to the others, the pilots were attempting to get the secret documents, carried in our weapons locker, and take them with us. I pointedly told them to,

"Fuck the secrets and get the hell out of here!"

I knew we needed perimeter security fast. We rallied under the shattered rear empennage of our shot up and shot down helicopter. You know, I must of spent a total of ten or fifteen minutes around that hole in the right side of JG 67 and to this day I cannot recall it. It's The Ghastly Skull of Death and I have blocked all its distinct features into a hazy, erratic circle much larger than a basketball. The unique aspect about this entire episode was that we survived with only one man injured. All Jollys prior to us, who had taken a 37mm AAA round in the chopper, blew up a 'la Locker. We had come down in one large and several smaller pieces. The coincidence of the impact of that mortal round is so fantastic it could be used as a linch pin plot of a Hollywood movie; maybe the title could be, "Rescue-Rescue." The round detonated at the last main structural cross member of the helicopter. If it had been right or left of that particular spot by as few inches as six, the explosion probably would of cut the tail section off. As it was, when we were in the air the tail rotor performed lazy figure eights which were useless to our flight progress. It was also a fact we had the minimum forward air speed, about 60 mph, to maintain relative flight. As all "rotor-heads" know, no tail rotor, no go no-where but spinning uncontrollably downward until smash. If the 37mm blast had been a few feet lower or slower in momentum, it would of been another Jolly Green "by the grace of the gods go I" story. Which reminds me, do you know the difference between a fairy tale and a war story? The fairy tale starts, "Once upon a time..."; where a war story begins, "No Shit! There I was thought I was gonna die!" And, of course, if the AAA round had bludgeoned a few feet higher, Tom Pope would have lost his head in the

heat of battle. As the "luck of that coin predetermined," he was alive, helmet blown off and shot up with shrapnel, bleeding from multitudinous wounds (although his flak vest protected his vital organs), as well as his amputated leg, and going towards irreversible shock rapidly.

So, there we were under the tattered remnants of a flying machine, all six of us waiting for something to happen. I wasn't for sticking around allowing the Communists greeting committee to welcome us with a block party serving hot fire and lead poisoning. My M-16 was, of course, locked and loaded, when I turned it on Major Darghty and said we had to get out of there. He replied rescue was on its way. I leaned over Tom and reassured him,

"Tom, its alright, but we may have to make a run for it! Can you hold on?"

The pallor of his face loomed distressfully close to shock, as I asked,

"Where's your kit, we're going to need the extra ammo and grenades."

Now, the hand grenades which all good, but disobedient, PJ's carried in Indochina were a Big NO-NO in the pilots eyes. So much so, Lt. Colonel Ratcliffe, upon finding out I was operating a clandestine grenade school at Long Tieng (Lima Site 98/Alternate 20, the secret CIA airport of northern Laos out of which we operated), proclaimed any flight crewmember, re: Pararescuemen, caught with grenades would be court martialled for disobedience of a direct order. Well, no real PJ ever paid strict attention to any officer, even one as competent, compassionate and honest as Chester, a man who I respected to the utmost. But, it's MY ASS on the ground, Sir, and I NEED this piece of equipment to maintain the security of MY ASS and MY PATIENTS BUTT, Sir! Therefore, the PJ's who wanted the item, got it, either carried surreptitiously in his extra gear, or I placed them in the medical kit prior to the flight and resealed the container so the officers would not suspect the medical equipment had real emergency equipment within. RECONDO school had impressed upon us that grenades could most effectively deter The Cong. The grenade could dissuade

through no muzzle blast as would come from a rifle; it prevented the NVA from concentrating on the spot of the flash of a fired weapon. The grenades could be used to discourage "Charles" from easily and rapidly following you when escaping and evading their intent to capture. And, that's how at least six PJ's at Udorn dealt with the 'Just Say No to Grenades' campaign by our squadron commander, Colonel "He's got some big balls" Ratcliffe.

I ran into the dead Jolly trying to locate those consequential pounds of explosives amid the mess and trash of our catastrophic circumstance.

Then ran back to Tom and said, "I can't find your kit."

He replied, "Well your going to have to do the job with yours."

We both knew what he meant:

- It was a time of desperation ticked off by the inquisitors torturous hands, inflicting the fears of influential pain docked upon your person; creeping time, ever so slowly, to desperate measured death.

Tom Pope and I, along with a few other of the younger PJ's had made a decision and had asked those others of the same mind to abide by it however disgusting the action may seem. We were dedicated to not being captured! The RECONDO course had disclosed in graphic, descriptive terms, the gruesome, grotesque and thoroughly nauseating facts of how and what kind of torture would be in store for those caught by the NVA; elite special operation personnel would fair worse. The instructors at the Nha Trang RSVN school sparred no detail into the subject. And those of us who had listened realized that if caught, we were charred, eviscerated meat. So, deny the enemy! Deny him the serenade of our screams; deny him our spasms of agony; deny him the propaganda possibilities; deny him information; deny him the only way possible. The most able of the pair of PJ's was to kill his wounded friend and then if injured too the point of near helplessness, booby trap his own body with the grenades; get a few of the fuckers when they came to investigate the slack forms. After all the NVA booby trapped American dead for the same purpose. Turn-a-bout was

only fair play. And, like the great, mighty warriors of the Norse legends, you'd be taking your personal battle kills to Valhalla as your eternal servants. Beats the hell out of slow cooking, head downwards, body bound to a tree spread-eagle over a bar-b-que for three days with your balls sewn in you mouth. Major Darghty, our pilot, interrupted us as I got morphine out to inject Tom, easing his pain; I still considered running with him on my back. The officer told us our rescue Jolly was inbound.

Next to Chester Ratcliffe, Marty Frederic Donohue and Carl W. Oliver, The Pilot who flew through that flak to pick us up has the BIGGEST BALLS OF ALL. Now, whether he had direct permission or instinctively perceived the only course available, The Man flew his Jolly through all the Fucking Shit that blew us out of the sky and landed his aircraft within a few feet of ours; tail ramp pointed upslope, the likely avenue of ambush. Our three pilots and the flight engineer immediately ran for the door and interior safety of the rescue Jolly, leaving Tom and I waiting for, wouldn't you know it like a grade B movie script from Hollywood, my best friend and drinking partner Tommy W. Meyer. He came out of their Jolly on the run with Dan E. Galde, the other PJ, along side. They lifted Tom Pope's stretcher and returned to the waiting Jolly, its turbines tense for takeoff, as I maintained flank security. Afforded cover from the right external fuel tank, I protected the crew door as Tom Pope was placed in. Tommy Meyer screamed over the deafening combination of exploding ordinance and screeching turbines to get in. I lunged for the door, Tommy grasped my shoulder pulling me inwards as the Jolly accelerated into flight. Then a machine gun went off.

I was kneeling down on the floor of the Jolly preparing to start intravenous therapy after handing Tommy Meyer the narcotic kit to give Tom Pope more morphine and ease his misery. The roaring, agonizing howl of a machine gun sent my heart racing in fright attempting to escape the overcrowded condition of fear in my body; my internal thoughts gasped,

"My god, shot down again. Now, we're really fucked!"

But, it was Dan Galde releasing his mini-beast to rage fire and hell's stone. Three NVA, who'd followed the external tank's slither of JG 67 to our position, were preparing to disable another Jolly when Dan made them

dance mini-death. We increased our altitude, ground fire concentrated on us as the Sandy's tried to prevent another Jolly shot down. 12.7mm, 23mm, 37mm and 57mm anti-aircraft artillery opened on us; small arms automatic rifle fire spewed past us peppering the sky around us with their destructive fireworks, gray and black shrouds and green tracers. The valley of Muang Xepon Laos receded as we climbed to a safer altitude, and our Jolly pilot turned us towards Thailand and the nearest hospital, NKP.

Of course, that's not the end of the events of 18 January 1969.

When we arrived at "Naked Fanny" I broke down, physically and psychologically drained, emotionally spent. An Air Force doctor gave me the once over and permitted me, after I asked, to see Tom Pope.

I walked down a puke green, colored hospital corridor, unsure of what I'd find through the ominous swinging doors at the end. I walked hesitantly. I looked through the glass window set in the door, frightened, fearing the worst. I saw a white sheeted figure, still, unmoving. My heart stuttered; my mind reeled,

"He's dead."

I couldn't stand the agitation in my soul, yet, I opened the door, walked to the hospital gurney on which he lay, placed my hand on his shoulder and gently shook him.

"Tom?"

I inquired looking with hope and fear, the amalgam of desperation, at my friend and fellow PJ. My hand was shaking, quivering like a cornered little animal. His eyes opened, glazed yet cognitive and he smiled,

"How are you?" He replied, his words thick with narcotic stupor.

"Not bad considering what we've just been through." I confided, attempting to keep in check the dull feeling of anguish.

"Hey," Tom said, "you want a laugh?"

"Yes," I replied, trying to remain light hearted amid the disagreeable fact of his several and severe injuries.

Tom continued,

"Two doctors came in and examined my leg ...," his words difficult and slow, his pronunciation complicated by his uncoordinated tongue and cottoned mouth.

"You know one of them turned to the other exclaiming, 'Look at that (pointing to the damaged leg) it must've been a real bad medic to have had to use two tourniquets on this guy.'"

Tom incensed verbally landed his punch while staring down the two presumptuous REMF's,

"I'm alive aren't I?"

The doctors, taken aback by his statement, left in embarrassed silence.

"Listen, D.C. 'Surfer' Johnson, you did good work. Always Remember That! I'm alive aren't I?"

"Yea, Tom, you are. Thanks."

He faded off to rest before his operation as I turned to exit and left him passing into euphoria.

Our remaining team returned to Udom late that night. I took to the bottle heavy and stayed that way for years into decades. Tom would also return. He got his last ride in a HH-53B Jolly Green Giant during his convalescence before he left stateside. His camouflaged figure, supported by crutches, the left fatigue leg pinned up and his right arm raised in a salute with his fingers in a 'V' sign to the Jolly's, would become the signature of Pararescue tenacity. Tom Pope departed; I stayed.

It was twenty-five years later that I found out who The Sandy Man was. Oh! Not just any hot shot, driving those beautiful flying machines called affectionally, "Sandys", A-1 Douglas Skyraiders, whose motto was, "You've been had by a Sandy Spad!" No! Tom Pope and I and our Jolly crews saved the Commander of the 602nd Special Operations Squadron, Lieutenant Colonel Lurie Morris.